

**Before the  
Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
Telecommunications Relay Services and	)	
Speech-to-Speech Services for	)	CG Docket No. 03-123
Individuals with Hearing and Speech	)	
Disabilities	)	

**COMMENTS OF SORENSON COMMUNICATIONS, INC.**

Sorenson Communications, Inc. (“Sorenson”) submits these Comments in response to the *Public Notice*<sup>1</sup> released in the above-captioned proceeding, in which the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau seeks comment on the accessibility of the Commission’s activities and programs under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.<sup>2</sup> The Commission’s regulations implementing section 504 require it “to ensure that the Commission’s programs and activities are fully accessible.”<sup>3</sup>

Sorenson is concerned that the Commission does not currently afford deaf members of the public full access to video relay service (“VRS”), the only service that allows deaf users of American Sign Language (“ASL”) to communicate by wire in their own language.<sup>4</sup> If a deaf visitor to the Commission wishes to place a video call, he or she

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<sup>1</sup> *The Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Seeks Comment on the Commission’s Policies and Practices Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, Public Notice, CG Docket No. 03-123, 22 FCC Rcd 5474 (2007) (“*Public Notice*”).

<sup>2</sup> See 29 U.S.C. § 794.

<sup>3</sup> 47 C.F.R. § 1.1810.

<sup>4</sup> No other service advances the ADA’s goal of “functional equivalency” more than VRS. See 47 U.S.C. § 225(a)(3). As Commissioner Adelstein has noted, “VRS more vividly conveys emotion than traditional relay services” and “opens a world of new communications opportunities.” *Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-*

may do so only by using the videophone located near the Commission's meeting room, TW-C305. That videophone, however, appears to be dedicated to Federal Relay, a service intended solely for the use of federal government employees, federal contractors and selected other groups, or for members of the public seeking to reach a government agency.<sup>5</sup>

To fulfill the accessibility mandate of section 504, the FCC should ensure that deaf visitors to the Commission have unfettered access to traditional VRS.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Federal Relay, VRS allows deaf users to place calls to hearing people anywhere in the country using the provider of the user's choice.<sup>7</sup> The Commission's current practice of restricting on-premises callers to Federal Relay denies those callers the full access mandated by section 504.<sup>8</sup> It may also lead to inadvertent misuse of Federal Relay, as

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*Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, Declaratory Ruling and Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, Statement of Commissioner Jonathan S. Adelstein, 21 FCC Rcd 5442, 5475 (2006) ("*VRS Interoperability Order*"); see also *VRS Interoperability Order* ¶ 11 (VRS "provides a degree of 'functional equivalency' that is not attainable with text-based TRS").

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., "What Is Federal Relay?" ("Federal Relay was established under Public Law 100-542 . . . in order to allow Federal employees who are deaf, hard-of-hearing, deaf/blind and or have speech disabilities equal communication access.") and "Authorized Users of Federal Relay," available at: <<http://www.federalrelay.us/>>.

<sup>6</sup> See *VRS Interoperability Order* ¶ 34 (functional equivalency requires that consumers have "unfettered access" to the VRS provider of their choice).

<sup>7</sup> Attempts to use the current videophone to reach a VRS provider result in an error message. Users are restricted to calling the designated Federal Relay provider or making point-to-point calls. (Point-to-point calls are calls between two deaf individuals and do not require an interpreter.)

<sup>8</sup> A hearing person attending an FCC meeting or program can easily make calls back to his or her office, clients or friends without having to leave the FCC. Deaf individuals are entitled to the same convenience. Without ready access to VRS, a deaf individual may effectively be denied access to FCC programs and activities if he or she cannot afford to be out of touch with clients, associates or family members while attending events at the FCC.

deaf visitors to the FCC may mistake Federal Relay for traditional VRS and use the service to make calls that are not directed to a federal agency or a federal employee.

Sorenson suggests that the FCC remedy this problem by installing one or more non-Federal Relay videophones in the Commission's building.<sup>9</sup> Sorenson would be happy to provide and install as many VP-200s as the Commission needs for this purpose, free of charge.<sup>10</sup> As with all Sorenson videophones, the VP-200s provided to the FCC will allow users to choose any VRS provider they desire and to make deaf-to-deaf video calls. Implementing this solution will make the Commission a more inclusive and accessible place,<sup>11</sup> helping it remain "a model not only of compliance – but of leadership" on disability-related issues.<sup>12</sup>

The Commission also should modify its *Section 504 Handbook* in two ways. First, the handbook erroneously states that "VRS calls must be initiated by the sign

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<sup>9</sup> The Commission's rules require it to modify its practices to ensure full access to its programs and activities, taking into account "advances in relevant technology and achievability." 47 C.F.R. § 1.1810. As part of its section 504 review, therefore, the Commission should modify its policies to ensure that users are able to take advantage of current technology and place VRS calls from the FCC's premises using any providers' service.

<sup>10</sup> The VP-200 is the most advanced of Sorenson's videophones. It incorporates an array of deaf-friendly features such as a pan/tilt/zoom camera that works with a click of a button, and a new user interface and remote control.

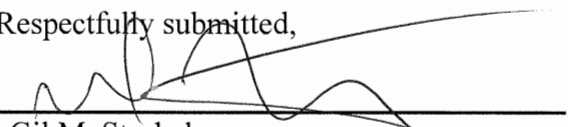
<sup>11</sup> *Federal Communications Commission Section 504 Programs and Activities Accessibility Handbook* at 2 ("The FCC is committed to fostering an attitude of inclusion and a commitment to access that will permeate all Commission programs and activities."), available at: <[http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/section\\_504.html](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/section_504.html)> ("*Section 504 Handbook*").

<sup>12</sup> *Amendment of Part 1, Subpart N of the Commission's Rules Concerning Non-Discrimination on the Basis of Disability in the Commission's Programs and Activities*, Order, 18 FCC Rcd 4034 (2003), Separate Statement of Commissioner Michael J. Copps; see also *id.*, Separate Statement of Chairman Michael K. Powell (applauding efforts to "further secure the FCC's place as one of the most accessible institutions in government").

language user.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, VRS calls can be initiated by hearing individuals as well as deaf ASL users. Second, the handbook should be updated to reflect the fact that ASL-to-Spanish VRS is a form of authorized TRS that is available today.<sup>14</sup>

Michael D. Maddix  
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May 22, 2004

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<sup>13</sup> Section 504 Handbook at 50.

<sup>14</sup> See *Telecommunications Relay Services and Speech-to-Speech Services for Individuals with Hearing and Speech Disabilities*, Order on Reconsideration, 20 FCC Rcd 13140 (2004) (recognizing ASL-to-Spanish VRS as a form of TRS that is eligible for compensation from the Interstate TRS Fund).